

RACIAL HARMONY FORUM
Meeting Summary

JULY 23, 2002
STOCKTON CIVIC AUDITORIUM
525 NORTH CENTER STREET
STOCKTON CALIFORNIA

MEMBERS PRESENT

Bishop Stephen Blaire, Diocese of Stockton
Chief Edward Chavez, Stockton Police Department
Roger Coover, President/Publisher, *The Record*
Baxter Dunn, San Joaquin County Sheriff
Gary Gillis, Chief, City of Stockton Fire Department
Pastor Bob Hailey, Unity Southern Baptist Church/Metro Ministry
Brittany Hood, Youth Advisory Commissioner
Don Halseth, representing John Rieckewald, Superintendent of Manteca Unified
Bill Huyett, Superintendent, Lodi Unified School District
Dennis Lee, President, Asian-American Chamber of Commerce
Mark Lewis, City Manager
Janet Lilly, President, African-American Chamber of Commerce
Bill Murray, Judge
Gary Podesto, Mayor
George Ridler, Superintendent, Stockton Unified School District
Jose Rivera, Administrator, Kaiser Permanente
Breanne Robertson, Youth Advisory Commissioner
Randy Ruby, Executive Director Builders Exchange of Stockton, Inc.
Christine Tien, Deputy City Manager
Doug Wilhoit, CEO, Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce

The Forum met on July 23, 2002 at 11:30 a.m.

INTRODUCTION

Mayor Podesto thanked everyone for attending. He announced that Johnny Ford, an African-American, has accepted the position of Director of the Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Ford is from Durham, North Carolina. The Mayor said that the City is very fortunate to have Mr. Ford here to support events that will create a better cultural environment.

The Mayor said that he would like the forum to concentrate on four categories – jobs, education, law enforcement, and the faith communities, and come up with recommendations, goals, suggestions for policy changes, and commitments from the group to report back to the community. He distributed notes and minutes from previous meetings.

Mr. Coover asked for a listing of changes that have already been made based on input from the meetings.

It was suggested that a staff report be prepared on changes that have already been implemented.

The Mayor said that the issue of going back to district voting is being discussed. Voting was changed in 1990, so in the primary the top two candidates in a district have a citywide election. He said that some people in the southern area of the City have felt alienated by this, even though this would not have changed any of the prior election results.

Bishop Blair asked the Mayor what the desired purpose/outcome/goal is of this task force.

City Manager Mark Lewis said that one goal would be to come up with some recommendations that can be implemented, characterized in terms of a strategic plan, because some may take time to implement.

Ms. Lilly suggested picking three or four primary issues under the four categories and making recommendations on them.

Dr. Huyett said that as this is a city and county-wide group, it would be good to think of things that could be done collaboratively and cross boundary lines, whether they be religious institutions, school districts, etc.

Fire Chief Gary Gillis asked what other communities have done that has worked.

Mayor Podesto replied that the Task Force is doing more than almost any other community and other communities are asking for information.

Bishop Blair noted that Stockton is one of the most diverse communities in the world, and this is a great opportunity to create a model. A vision of racial harmony should be formulated for the community and every institution could buy into it.

Ms. Robertson agreed, but added that she did not feel that everyone would have the same vision, so it is important to get input from the community.

Ms. Lilly said that the vision could be very global and generalized to start with, and then narrowed down as issues are dealt with. She said that she did not feel a facilitator was necessary at this point, as (s)he may not have attended all task force meetings.

Mayor Podesto said that it is his goal to have this done by some time in September.

Bishop Blair pointed out that if what is to be done is problem solving, one could identify three or four major problems and address those, but one would still have racial disharmony. He asked what it really means for the community to be in racial harmony. He said that all the data that was submitted must be reviewed to find the threads that seem to be common to all the testimony. He said that while one must address problems, everyone should be working on the vision.

Dr. Huyett thanked everyone for his or her comments. He said that the vision in his mind would be a brief fifteen word statement, but what he is hearing is that there are common factors that involve all school districts, entities, how people are treated, etc. He said that a philosophy statement, or a set of values, must come after a vision, and, before problem solving, the goal must be defined.

Mr. Ridler said that he agreed with Bishop Blair's statements regarding problem solving. The question now is what will be done in the future, and this will be in the goals and the vision statement.

Chief Gillis noted that this will be a long-term project. He recounted that after working towards equity in the Fire Department in the early 1970s, it then got off track. In the next couple of years, there will be major retirements and the Department will have gone backwards. He said that this group, or a group like it, needs to continue to meet and monitor complaints. There must be a place where the community can meet and voice their concerns

Mr. Lewis commented that it seems that all share the same goals.

Doug Wilhoit recounted that he heard a comment this morning that people from North Stockton would not mingle with people from South Stockton, and he wondered how perceptions could be changed.

The Mayor pointed out that the purpose of Downtown development is to attract new Stocktonians.

Chief Chavez agreed that one should start with a global perspective. He also agreed that perception is reality to people. He said that every citizen in the community must be treated with dignity and respect. However, within each ethnicity, people do not get along, and he cited gangs as an example of this.

Mr. Wilhoit said that there must also be personal responsibility by citizens to become involved and who must be responsible for their actions in their community.

Mr. Coover voiced agreement with the vision and values, but he would like to see a mindset for commitment by the task force and the community.

Ms. Robertson said that youth must also be shown how to be responsible, as it is youth that are involved in gangs. She said that some discrimination is based on how people perceive youth.

Mayor Podesto agreed that perception is reality, and gave the example again of district voting changes and how some in South Stockton feel that they have been disenfranchised, even though election results show that district changes had no effect on the outcome of past election.

Ms. Lilly said that she has two teenage sons and her perception of racism and their perception of racism are very different.

Ms. Robertson said that racism has its roots in the older generation, but this is changing, and youth are going on with their own perceptions.

Ms. Tien added that as youth go out into the workforce or to college, their perceptions may change.

The forum members agreed that they would like to have a facilitator to help with the goals and vision statement.

Dr. Huyett offered to supply a facilitator or act in that capacity himself.

Mayor Podesto suggested that the members begin formulating the vision statement.

Judge Bill Murray commented that the Task Force must relay to the community that they heard their suggestions. He suggested that the members be provided with a document that summarizes public comment, collates it into different topics or subjects that would be helpful at arriving at an action plan. He stated that beyond general goals and policy statements, the forum should take time individually to look at specific things can be done so that the message gets communicated to the community that their discussions during the forum have caused the forum to work towards a specific goal. He stated that he feels that the public will respond to things that get done that are different than has been done in the past.

Mayor Podesto outlined the strategy: 1) the vision; 2) the set of commitments; and 3) the actions.

Judge Murray cautioned that they do not want to create a document and then nothing is done. People need to know that the City is genuine by doing something specific.

Dr. Huyett concurred stating that there definitely must be an action plan that goes behind the goals. He cautioned that many times programs have been created to store problems, but it is sustained efforts that have made a difference. Programs may come and go. He noted that this is not a one-year effort, it has been going on for generations.

Dennis Lee, President of the Asian-American Chamber of Commerce asked for clarification on the vision asking if it is a vision and commitment of the task force, the City offices, education or the community as a whole. He noted that organizations spoke before the forum and make suggestions for education, law enforcement, etc. He suggested that those groups who are addressing these issues be identified and assisted and in this way they would help the forum with these issues.

Dr. Huyett discussed the components of a “vision.” He stated that a good vision is a short statement, 15 words or less and has a belief statement, an affect upon and a subject (who is affected). He stated that “all children will learn” is a powerful vision for educators adopted by some school districts.

Doug Wilhoit, CEO of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, suggested the following: “Bring the greater Stockton area citizens together to dispel perceptions and make community harmony a reality.” He felt that perception is the biggest problem.

Janet Lilly, President of the African-American Chamber of Commerce, suggested the following: “All residents, visitors and workers in the City of Stockton shall be treated with fair opportunity regardless of the color of their skin.”

Bishop Steven Blaire discussed some of the components of a vision statement could be that this is a community that strives to treat each person with appropriate dignity and respect. He stated that there should also have some component that while each person belongs to his or her various groupings, there would be a respect for every other grouping. He added that he felt that the word “citizen” should be avoided because some of our disharmony involves those who are not citizens.

Mayor Podesto favored used “community” as opposed to “greater Stockton” which would be a broader definition.

Dan Halseth, representing Manteca Unified School District, commented that the word “diversity” is in the MUSD’s mission statement. He suggested wording be included such as “celebrates it’s diversity” which acknowledges that it is a strength.

Mayor Podesto stated he feels that the community needs to “live” it not “celebrate” it.

Judge Murray commented that the task force must first discuss components and concepts such as diversity, harmony, dignity, etc. and then proceed from there.

Bishop Blaire suggested that a component be added that the diversity is reflected in the power structure of community, or representation in the governance of the community.

Mr. Wilhoit stated that he does not feel that the general public recognizes that diversity is a real strength in our community.

Roger Coover, President/Publisher of the Record, commented that it should not be assumed that “it is our strength” because many people feel that it is our weakness right now. He suggested “working to make diversity our strength through racial harmony.”

George Ridler, Superintendent of the Stockton Unified School District, recommended that a facilitator be used so that all task force members can be participants.

Dr. Huyett suggested a brainstorming session because there may be many more components than discussed today and they can be filtered down to those most important.

Judge Murray felt that it would be difficult to have this type of brain storming session without seeing the comments made at all the previous meetings in a collated format in a way that addresses specific areas of concern.

Mayor Podesto noted that the handout he provided contains the important highlights of the meetings, but they are not collated. He stated that he will have that done by topic.

Dr. Huyett read the vision that has come out of the discussion: “Building a community committed to diversity by promoting racial harmony, human dignity and fair opportunity.”

Mayor Podesto noted that communication, or lack of, is one of the most common threads that was raised at the meetings.

Mr. Coover commented that it is necessary to go beyond incorporating what was heard because the task force only heard from a number of people. He noted that many of the issues have been around a long time. He felt that this must be bigger than just addressing specific issues. Other people need to be involved in this debate.

Dr. Huyett revised the suggested vision: "A community committed to diversity where racial harmony, human dignity and fair opportunity are our strengths."

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m. to July 25, 2002 at 11:30 a.m.